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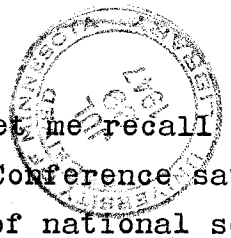

THE DECLINE OF HUMANITARIANISM

by Bertrand de Jouvenel

Let me recall a joke played after the First World War, while the Peace Conference sat in Paris, remapping Europe according to the principle of national self-determination. The Conference was besieged by delegations of little-known nationalities, claiming recognition and seeking support among the members of the French Houses of Parliament.

The anti-democratic Action Francaise saw its chance to expose the ignorance of the representatives of the people. Notepaper headed "The National Committee of the Poldeve People" was printed and a circular letter to all members of the French Parliament was concocted. In vague but moving terms this letter described the long sufferings of the Poldeves under unspecified foreign oppression. The time to set right this injustice had come; French and democratic generosity were invoked; and the recipient of the circular was begged to sign his name to a manifesto for the emancipation of the unhappy Poldeves.

It sounded so much like similar bona fide documents that over 150 politicians signed unquestioningly. And the Action Francaise then came out triumphantly with a list of dupes comprising many important personalities, including some "authorities on foreign affairs."

They were laughed at for a whole week. Yet something more than their ignorance had been proved; their ready generosity. The thought of oppression was so repugnant that they had responded spontaneously. Their knowledge was at fault, but their hearts were in the right place.

Let us imagine the same joke played today. Probably the same high proportion of politicians would not blandly assume the existence of the Poldeve people. But before signing, those who did would want to know by whom these Poldeves were oppressed: "If by Franco I sign, if by Tito I don't." The spontaneous reflex of humanitarianism is smothered by the partisan spirit. The grandsons of those who greeted the Czar with cries of "Vive la Pologne!" don't want to hear of oppression in Poland or the former Baltic states. They won't let humanitarian emotions interfere with their political loyalties.

Human sympathy has become selective.

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When, more than half a century ago, the Jewish officer Dreyfus was undeservedly condemned for treason, there was a huge rally round his name, in France and in the whole world. Dreyfusism became synonymous with the defense of innocence, and millions to whom Dreyfus was a mere shadow struggled and prayed for his justification.

Now, before one takes up the defense of an innocent, one must know to what clan he belongs. If his friends are the wrong sort of people, let him be condemned anyhow. It would not do at all to help clear him, it might benefit "the others" and discredit "us." If, on the other hand, he is "one of us," he must be acquitted anyhow. There will be time enough afterwards to admit between ourselves: "Oh, by the way, our friend So-and-So was guilty after all."

This "new spirit" has been all too apparent in recent cases. Take for instance a hero of the Resistance accused of betraying to the Germans the meeting place of his chief and comrades. Since he belonged to the Gaullist branch of the Resistance, as opposed to the Communist, sympathetic elements rallied round him; the antagonistic against. His acquittal was a victory for his side, his re-arrest on new evidence, a victory for the other side.

Until quite recently it was a trait of Occidental society that opinion could be mobilized in favor of the victim of an injustice. Anyone who suffered benefited by this general sympathy, even though he might be guilty. Innocence was an asset but suffering was also an asset. On the Old Continent, thousands protested in favor of Sacco and Vanzetti, though completely ignorant of the facts of the case. This partiality to the underdog has often annoyed responsible rulers: they held that it interfered with the maintenance of order, that it was not possible, when famous writers took up their pens, when students addressed meetings, and so forth, to keep to a set course of necessary severity.

Now the wheel has turned in an amazing manner. Suffering, as such, and even innocence, as such, no longer fires public sympathy. The leaders of opinion remain indifferent to the existence of thousands of Dreyfus cases, to the sufferings of millions, unless and until political capital can be made out of this oppression or that injustice.

Commiseration is held to be such a shameful failing that, when recently the police broke into the monasteries to seize men who had been given a haven, and when the abbots were manacled and thrown into prison for harboring them though they had previously harbored members of the Resistance, there was practically no voice raised to recall that charity is no sin.

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The full responsibility for this change of heart rests upon the intellectuals. The more liberal they were, the more they used to believe in the Rights of Man and the sacredness of the individual. They not only took up the defense of the innocent, as Zola did, but also they demanded leniency for the guilty. Many writers of the Nineteenth Century demanded that the death penalty should end with it. Lamartine said so, Victor Hugo said so. Doing away with le bagne was one of their ruling ambitions. As for "political crimes," they would not hear of drastic punishments: "Exile no one!" exclaimed Hugo.

The intellectual then deemed it his main mission to bring home to all, the sufferings of the unfairly, or even of the fairly, condemned. He spoke for the unhappy, for les miserables. Now the intellectuals pride themselves on their ruthlessness. They are austere prophets of history. Following in the footsteps of that monstrous giant Hegel, they purport to foretell the trend of history. Society must drive towards the goal to them apparent, even if it drives over human bodies.

To be sure, there is, in the human complexion, a faculty of sympathy which cannot be neglected. It must be put to good purpose. Certainly one should not fail to use some sufferings and some injustices as levers to excite the crowds. But the post-war tendency is to concentrate on the sufferings of political friends and to exploit the injustices perpetrated by political enemies. With that bias the murdered become assets, provided they are the right kind of victims, with the right kind of murderers.

On the Old Continent, the more "progressive" the post-war intellectuals the more superior is their attitude towards blood and tears, regarded as incidental to the processes of History. Yet the former boast of the intellectual was that he had been the moving spirit for the emancipation of the individual from the tyranny of secular and religious authorities. He had defended the body of man against the police, and the mind of man against the Inquisition.

Reasons of State might demand that So-and-So be imprisoned, but the intellectual said "no." The defense of orthodoxy might require that some opinion be suppressed, but the intellectual said "no."

Now, strangely enough, many intellectuals turn themselves into servants of a Reason of State and of an orthodoxy. They deem it their duty to be engage, which I cannot translate otherwise than by the terms of incorporation and enlistment. They devote themselves to a purpose, measure their merit by their loyalty to that purpose, conform their

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opinions to the orthodoxy they have adopted, and determine their actions according to their utility to the purpose, which is just another form of the "Reason of State."

In a word, they are busy reconstructing the very tyrannies they claimed to have overthrown; only in less defensible form. A case could be made out for measures necessary to the preservation of a living community; and a mind fired with an absolute faith could deem it a duty to force men into salvation. The new Reason of State, however, is in favor not of a living community, but of a construction to be erected: The new orthodoxy is enforced not for the salvation of the individuals themselves but to further some dogmatic "process of History."

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Unfortunately, the Savonarola attitude is not restricted to the Communist intellectuals. It is taken up in many quarters. It is a fashion. Lean virility, toughness and forcefulness are assumed as a becoming garb. No sugary benevolence for the likes of us!

To be sure, the humane instinct is present in all men. But it has to be awakened, quickened. Unless the hunted comes your way you don't know about his sufferings. If the innocent are hemmed in by the silent walls of a prison, if the oppressed are far away in some other country, if no voice is raised for the dumb, then you remain unaware, or with a mere shadowy, unreal awareness. And one doesn't especially want to hear about injustice and suffering; on top of all the personal worries. One settles down into acceptance of things as they are.

Something like that must have happened to the Germans. Their sensibility to human sufferings was dulled because no ringing voice could be raised among them to protest against the diabolical things which were being done.

Thank God, we have nothing as bad in Western Europe today. But we have ample vindictiveness and cruelty to justify the raising of voices which do not have the same excuses as in Germany for remaining mute. We have cause which would have driven the intellectuals of previous generations to fervid protests.

It is not so today. As a class, the intellectuals have divorced themselves from humanitarianism. Building a better world is their concern, rather than making this present world more livable. De minimis non curat praetor. The question is whether the fate of human beings comes under the heading of "little things."

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. IV, NO. 30

By Frank C. Hanighen July 23, 1947

A particularly objectionable cartoon in the Washington Post (July 17) typifies what seems to be a veritable campaign, in the press and radio, to discredit Congress. Under the not exactly gentle caption "Government by Blackjack" appears a brutal figure, Congressman Taber of the House Appropriations Committee, swinging a bag of money like a weapon over the head of another figure, "Executive Dept.," and presenting to the latter a placard reading "No Money to Carry Out Any Act of Congress Unless I Personally Okay It." The reference is obviously to Taber's recent request -- an eminently fair one -- for an estimate of how the $400 million appropriated for Greece and Turkey will presumably be spent. Those who know anything about the role of the Legislature naturally assume that Taber was not only exercising his privilege but performing his duty. But many were doubtless inspired by the cartoon to share the cartoonist's animus against Taber and the Legislative arm of the Government.

Such attacks spring from various forces. One is the group composed of Communists and fellow travellers, many of whom work in the press and radio fields. These elements seek to discredit the Legislature which they correctly regard as the greatest obstacle to their plans to concentrate absolute power in the Executive. The outstanding historical example of this characteristic Communist strategy was the effort to discredit the German Reichstag in the days of the Weimar Republic, thereby making easier Hitler's seizure of power. (The German Communists thought that Hitler would prove unable to govern and that they would inherit the totalitarian dictatorship which he set up.)

Another force is also important. It is the partiality of many members of the press and radio corps for their friends in the Executive departments. This is a difficult factor to measure, but few would deny that it has potency. Relationships have developed between press and bureaucracy -- particularly during the long regime of the Democratic administration -- and many in both professions have learned to play ball with each other very profitably.

But it is possible that the greatest influence is the vague craving, permeating much of public thinking, for "action" regardless of whether such action might have good or bad long-range effects. The Executive can "act" with much dispatch, whereas the Legislative body considers, deliberates, compromises and retards action. Twelve years of the vivid and well-publicized actions of an Executive leader of the temperament of the late Mr. Roosevelt have developed in the public a taste for "someone who gets things done," whether they are done constitutionally or not.

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White House. There is increasing talk about some letters which President Roosevelt reportedly wrote to Stalin, shortly before he died. It is claimed that this correspondence shows how Roosevelt had become disillusioned with the Russian leader. A recent visitor to the White House reports that Truman brought up the subject of the letters, saying, "It would bring war, if they were published." Truman also remarked sadly, "If I had only known at Potsdam what I know now."

The same visitor who had last seen the President three months ago says that Truman's manner today is different. Three months ago, he seemed "cocky," "self-assured." Last week he appeared worried, irritable, and expressed himself as frankly depressed over the foreign situation.

Contrary to the prevailing impression that Truman will not attend the Rio de Janeiro Conference, which starts August 15, comes the news from reliable White House sources that the President is considering the possibility of flying down for the windup, returning immediately afterward to Washington. Such a quick trip would solve a diplomatic problem. If the President visited but one or several Latin Amer-

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ican countries, he would risk offending the others; yet he has no time to visit all. However, by appearing at the Rio conference, he would be paying a "collective" call on the representatives of all the Latin American republics there assembled.

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"Because of its political aspects, a government sponsored and financed soil conservation program might easily lead to wide regimentation of agriculture." This statement comes, not from the American Economy League, but from the General Manager of one of the largest farm co-operatives in the world -- Mr. James A. McConnell, of the Co-operative GLF (Grange-League-Federation) Exchange.

It is not generally recognized that a number of important farm organization leaders are opposed not only to the principle of subsidies but also to raiding of the public purse by the farm community. While it would be incorrect to describe Mr. McConnell as representative of all farm organizations, he does express the viewpoint of an extremely powerful segment. HUMAN EVENTS has obtained the following exclusive statement from McConnell:

"In terms of the public welfare, no one questions that there is a legitimate position for government in the saving of our natural resources. Of all such resources, our layer of top soil stands between us and starvation. That this should be protected is obvious -- so obvious that any project labelled 'soil conservation' is automatically acclaimed as being in the public interest.

"The fact is that many present proposals wearing this label are not only dangerous to the freedom of the farmer, and a threat to the American way of life, but will not do the job. We are too prone to discard proven research, methods of education, and individual action, and, for these, to substitute mass action backed by the power of the Government. Applying conservation methods useful in the South to Northern grasslands is one example of misguided mass action. Nothing could be more costly and less effective than to apply heroic methods of conservation to great sections of the country devoted to livestock farming in the temperate grassland areas of the North, methods which at best would be applicable only to those areas specializing in crops with light soils prone to erode easily.

"Because it is always true that 'he who pays the fiddler, calls the tune,' American agriculture will never be entirely free until it stops crying for Government subsidies, either direct or indirect. The efficient farmer needs only the protection properly given by Government to every citizen, no more, no less."

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These are dog days for the fans of Republican Party politics: little relative change in the status of the various hopefuls, despite much conversation. Dewey's western junket has apparently left his leading position unaltered. The Taft camp is confidently banking on its leader's announced September trip to the Coast and mountain states. What is not mentioned is that the Ohioan considers an additional trip in October to Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Last week-end's flurry about MacArthur was based on scanty evidence, but the public interest aroused shows that the General has no mean following. As for Stassen, it looks like his main chance will be success in next April's primary in Wisconsin.

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The Dutch have abruptly shouldered the "white man's burden" in the East Indies with a vigor shocking to the Western world, and with results quite likely to be unfavorable to American foreign policy. This turn of events was not entirely unexpected. Not Merely Gossip on May 28 reported: "It is suspected that the Dutch

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authorities are procrastinating in their diplomatic negotiations with the Indonesian Government in order to build up their military forces for a showdown." Today, with sufficient troops, they have presumably decided that the time has come to lay aside parleying and to strike down the native independence movement by brute force. They are believed to have some 150 American lend-lease planes in the Indies and, while the U. S. has furnished no war material since V-J Day save for equipping a brigade of marines, America cannot escape criticism.

The State Department has issued a statement regretting that "negotiation has been discarded as a means of achieving the voluntary association between The Netherlands and the Indonesian people." London reaction is somewhat stronger. But these expressions of disapproval can have materially less effect than the voice of Moscow. The Soviet radio hastens to blame the United States, charging -- on grounds which remain obscure -- that the U. S. intervened in the affairs of the Indonesian Government, to the latter's detriment. The Communists have for long posed as the champions of the "races of color" in Asia as against the "white imperialists" and the natives are not likely to make a distinction between the Dutch and the Americans. It appears inevitable that what the Dutch have done will adversely affect the American world-wide campaign against Communism and Russian imperialism.

Another unhappy by-product is seen. The population of the Dutch Indies is largely Moslem. While it would be inaccurate to picture the Moslem world as closely knit and reacting uniformly to all events, there are bound to be repercussions in the new Pakistan, and perhaps also in the largely Moslem Near East.

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One of the most thoughtful articles in many months appears, not in a magazine of 20 million readers, but (as not uncommonly happens) in the current number of the small-circulation Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review. It is entitled "The Queue Society -- Do We Want It?" by Professor William A. Paton, of the Ann Arbor faculty.

"Americans have been doing a lot of standing in line," observes Professor Paton. "Queues -- once restricted to special occasions such as the sale of tickets to the world series -- have been a commonplace in every community. Everyone has seen them, day after day, ordinary citizens waiting for hours for a chance to buy a pair of stockings, a couple of frankfurters, or one small roll of toilet paper. We are long past the first shock of this phenomenon and have been on the verge of becoming resigned to the idea that in America, sweet land of liberty, we must follow the pattern of the totalitarian countries and line up to receive such doles of goods and services as the powers that be see fit to allot. . . .

"There is a choice to be made, that cannot be postponed any longer. The choice is between continuing to drift, under the pressure of a determined minority, into the stagnation of THE QUEUE SOCIETY or of purposefully resuming the march toward 'THE GOOD SOCIETY.'" The Professor then discusses some essentials to this end.

"The basic requirement is the revival of liberalism, clear-cut and unafraid, as the dominant note in our economic and political thinking . . . a preliminary step that would be helpful in clearing the air is recapture of the term 'liberal' from those who have been misusing it. The liberals, in the literal and historical meaning, are those who believe in liberty, in maximizing the elbow room of the individual and restricting the scope of government. Recently the term has been misappropriated by those who support the trend toward collectivism, glorification of the power of the State at the expense of the rights of the individual. This is certainly an ironic usage, and one not to be justified by semantics or otherwise. The long line of illustrious advocates of freedom of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries would not feel at all comfortable if they found themselves in the same boat with the crew now masquerading as liberals."

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Book Events

Five Chimneys, by Olga Lengyel. Chicago: Ziff-Davis Publishing Co. $3.00

The Other Kingdom, by David Rousset. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock. $2.75

This drowsy week of midsummer has been chosen for two publications of rather terrifying import, even to readers whose sense of terror has been numbed by the events of the last half-dozen years. The books are testimonies by survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, and it cannot be said that they make comfortable companions in a hammock or under a beach umbrella. But their special value is not in the addenda they make to the long chronicle of horror, but in affording us a prevision of the sort of universe that we or our children may be destined to inhabit.

The witnesses are Mme. Olga Lengyel, a Romanian, whose memoir of the Auschwitz, or Osweicim, camp is called Five Chimneys, and M. David Rousset, a Frenchman, who gives to his memoir of Buchenwald the title of The Other Kingdom. Each book of course is a translation; Mme. Lengyel's is said to be in part from an Hungarian original and in part at third-hand from a French version which appeared about a year ago. It contains many internal evidences of having been pointed up by the several professionals whose assistance she acknowledges. M. Rousset, however, is an experienced and highly skilled writer who had no need of editorial assistance; his is at once the more artistic and the calmer and more philosophic work, but it is certainly not on that account the less disturbing and portentous.

To some extent these testimonies complement and corroborate each other. Mme. Lengyel was for several months a prisoner in a camp where by some accounts four million men, women and children, mostly Jews, Poles and Gypsies, perished either in the gas chambers or by systematic starvation and cruelty, and where their corpses fed the furnaces night and day. Some think the figure much exaggerated; but the precise number of the victims seems irrelevant now, and the difference in horror between three and four million corpses altogether eludes the imagination and sensibilities. What matters is the vivid reminder that the expropriation, enslavement or extermination of whole categories of human beings has become a universally established principle of statecraft, whether the categories are by race as with the Nazis, or by class as with the Bolshevists, or merely national as with ourselves in the case of the Japanese-Americans of California or in the orders for the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Indeed, Mme. Lengyel, whose parents and children died in the gas chambers, seems herself to accept the principle; it is one of her bitternesses that at Auschwitz the insane were suffered to live while the "normal" were sent to die.

But more shocking even than this is the revelation of the bestial degradation to which human persons can be reduced by the devices of material and psychological terror, so enormously multiplied by technological innovation and psychiatric discovery. The brutalities of the S.S., even the demoniac extravagances of a Fraulein Irma Grese, seem less appalling than the corruption of the prisoners by the lust for survival. Treachery, theft, murder, sodomy and cannibalism were commonplaces of these camps, and the most intense and vicious forms of political intrigue were rife in them. At Buchenwald, if we may trust M. Rousset, the kitchen staff of prisoners fed their fellows soup made from corpses, while they sold to the local black markets the provisions consigned from Berlin and the packages sent at God knows what sacrifice by relatives.

Only the strongest spirits could resist contamination. And since most of us are less than heroic, we should do well to ponder the Marxist moral drawn by M. Rousset from his experience: that man is the creature of his material situation. -- J. M. Lalley

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